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SUBJECT: MEDIA WRAP-UP: NATO SUMMIT AND AFGHANISTAN; TURKEY--THE
POPE AND A BID TO JOIN THE EU. DECEMBER 01, 2006.

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Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) The NATO Summit in Riga and President Bush's support for a Global Partnership Initiative elicited commentary highlighting divergent French and American views, while discussion on Afghanistan illustrated the "urgent need to help NATO reverse the growing impression it was losing its grip." The Pope's visit to Ankara and Istanbul made headlines throughout the week, with widespread discussion of his gesture towards Turkey's Muslims in the context of his new and "conditional" support for Turkey's EU membership. End Summary.

NATO SUMMIT AND AFGHANISTAN - U.S. AND FRANCE DIFFER

¶2. (SBU) According to left-of-center Le Monde, at the end of the summit's first day, NATO leaders had agreed that the situation in Afghanistan was "an emergency." Laurent Zecchini contended that the 26 heads of state and governments were "convinced the future of the Atlantic Alliance would be played out in part in the Hindu Kush." In Catholic La Croix, Jean-Christophe Ploquin argued that "NATO had neither the means nor the will to react to what Afghanistan was becoming, a drug-trafficking nation," and concluded that the Riga Summit would be "dominated by the battle against the Taliban." Joseph Limagne in his editorial in regional Ouest France described the opening dinner of the Summit as "a war council" because, in Afghanistan, "NATO was losing on all fronts." Earlier in the week, right-of-center Le Figaro editorialist Pierre Rousselin characterized NATO's situation in Afghanistan as "an impasse" and compared NATO's "grim future" to that of the Americans and the British in Iraq, "where they were losing their wager."

¶3. (SBU) In right-of-center Le Figaro, Arnaud de La Grange quoted Minister of Defense Alliot-Marie's warning against "diluting the Alliance in unclear missions." De La Grange described Paris's "opposition to NATO's 'civilian shift'" and contrasted President Chirac's idea of a "contact group" with the democratic partnerships proposed by the U.S. Right-of-center Le Figaro concluded that President Chirac was eager to avoid "the mixing of the genres" or, as one French diplomat warned in right-of-center Le Figaro, "using the Alliance like a Swiss Army knife, everywhere and for everything." In right-of-center Le Figaro, Alexandrine Bouilhet argued that the "a la carte partnerships which NATO wanted to implement were irritating Paris" and claimed that "this was becoming

a new bone of contention" between Washington and Paris. Bouilhet argued that "Washington did not look favorably on Iran lurking over NATO's shoulder in Afghanistan."

14. (SBU) On the second day of the Summit, right-of-center Le Figaro concluded that "France was instrumental in limiting the political aspirations of the Atlantic Alliance" and managed to push through "the principle of a 'contact group' on Afghanistan." Arnaud de La Grange commented in right-of-center Le Figaro that "French diplomacy did not want the Riga summit to turn into a summit for NATO's expansion, its globalization or its dilution" and concluded that "none of this had happened, as a dose of realism emanating from the harsh situation in Afghanistan had doused these high ambitions." In Catholic La Croix, Jean-Christophe Ploquin agreed that "NATO had kept its distance from President Bush's ambitions" and concluded that "one was left with the feeling that George W. Bush had not been able to convince the Europeans of the urgency of the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan." In regional Ouest France, Joseph Limagne warned that "increased troop commitment in raging war zones carried the seeds of a worrisome shift" and affirmed that there was a "perceptible shift from peace-keeping to imposing peace," which in his view meant "war." In left-of-center Le Monde, Laurent Zecchini concluded that NATO leaders reached a consensus in Riga about the need to "reverse the growing impression that NATO was beginning to lose its grip in the battle with the Taliban guerrilla." Arnaud de La Grange concluded in right-of-center Le Figaro that "France managed to keep the principle of a global partnership from being formalized," which he saw as France's way of "leaving a door open for a future role for Europe's defense."

TURKEY: THE POPE'S VISIT, ANKARA'S BID TO JOIN EU

15. (SBU) Pope Benedict's visit to Turkey was widely publicized in the context of his previous controversial remarks on Islam. In an editorial entitled "Papal Diplomacy," left-of-center Le Monde argued that the "controversy had encouraged the Pope to reflect on Turkey's

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EU membership and see it in a different light." For left-of-center Le Monde, "the Pope's stopover in Ankara was re-opening the debate in a constructive manner." On FR2 television, the Pope's spokesman clarified what some analysts termed "the Pope's change of stance," and explained that "the theologian was learning the other aspect of a Pope's job, diplomacy." In right-of-center Le Figaro, editorialist Yves Threard characterized the Pope's trip as "a courageous gesture" because of the Pope's "personal opposition to Turkey's EU membership." Catholic La Croix pointed to the "risks" the Pope was taking, because his trip "would be seen as a political event and scrutinized as such." Left-wing Liberation called the visit a "charm offensive" directed at the Muslim world.

16. (SBU) The Pope's softer stance on Turkey's EU membership, characterized in right-of-center Le Figaro as "a real revolution," was offset by the EU Commission's recommendation to "partially freeze" the EU-25 talks with Ankara, leading Catholic La Croix to editorialize on a "message with two voices," which mixed the Pope's "comforting words to PM Erdogan" with "the insult by the EU-25." While right-of-center Le Figaro contended that "the EU decision was the equivalent of a de facto break in the negotiations," Dominique Quinio in Catholic La Croix argued that "despite appearances, the Pope and the EU's messages complemented each other." Quinio concluded that "Turkey's EU integration could only come about if Turkey complied with the requests made by both." Quinio further admonished Erdogan to "heed the demands" for religious freedom and "make the necessary concessions on Cyprus" if he wanted his country "to stay on course" with the European Union.

STAPLETON